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# DEFINITIONS IN PHILOSOPHY

WITH BRIEF COMMENTARIES  
BY  
MANLY P. HALL

COMPLIMENTARY WITH MONTHLY  
LETTER



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## DEFINITIONS IN PHILOSOPHY

To appreciate the scope and value of philosophy and its superiority over every other branch of learning, it seems appropriate to consider briefly the opinions of learned men relative to the importance and dignity of this noblest of human institutions. The quotations which follow are for the most part verbatim, but in a few cases we have slightly condensed the original statements; in no way however, adding to or altering the meaning.

*Hume: "Be a philosopher; but amidst all your philosophy be still a man."*

Learning should never separate a man from his world nor cause him to feel himself superior to others; rather it should bring him closer to the heart of mankind and bestow upon his soul a realization of the dignity of all life and the identity of all creatures.

*Cicero: "Philosophy, right defined, is nothing but the love of wisdom."*

The soul, ultimately disappointed in human relationships, must turn from its attachment to outward forms and bestow its affection upon those imperishable truths which alone can satisfy man's yearnings.

*Southey: "Philosophy is of two kinds: that which relates to conduct, and that which relates to knowledge. The first teaches us to value all things at their true worth, to be contented with little, modest in prosperity, patient in trouble, equal minded at all times. It teaches us our duty to our neighbor and ourselves, but it is he who pursues both that is the true philosopher. The more he knows the more he is desirous of knowing; and yet the further he advances in knowledge, the better he understands how little he can attain, and the more deeply he feels that God alone can satisfy the infinite desires of the immortal soul. To understand this is the height and perfection of philosophy."*

From this definition it becomes apparent that sacred and secular knowledge are but the aspects of one divine institution. True philosophy is not satisfied to reason only upon

mortal concerns but rises to loftier speculation intent upon discovering not only the law but the Maker of the law.

*Gifford:*

*"Divine philosophy! by whose pure light,  
We first distinguish, then pursue the right;  
Thy power the breast from every error frees,  
And weeds out all its vice by degrees."*

It is most fitting that a definition of philosophy should come to us in verse for as science is the prose of living so philosophy is the poetry of existence. By the perception of divine realities we come finally to rhyme all the dissonant lines of life.

*Epictetus: "All philosophy lies in two words: Sustain and abstain."*

The wise man sustains his reason by feeding it upon a sufficient diet of thoughts. He abstains from that which will bring sickness to his mind by eliminating from his thinking and living all thoughts and actions which are unreasonable and destructive.

*Coleridge: "In wonder all philosophy began; in wonder it ends; and admiration fills up the interspace.—But the first is the won-*

*der of ignorance, the last is the parent of adoration."*

Only the philosopher possesses the power of intelligent appreciation. To the wise man the wisdom of the universe becomes apparent. From the intelligent contemplation of existence arises a full realization of the perfection of that Parent Cause upon which all creation hangs.

*Cicero: "To study philosophy is nothing but to prepare oneself to die."*

We may face the small issues of the day with ignorance and still preserve some small illusion of security, but in the presence of that great transition which is the inevitable fate of all men, our only security lies in some adequate appreciation of the universe and its plan.

*Quarles: "Make philosophy thy journey."*

How wise was that old emblem-writer when he perceived that life is a journey in wisdom, action an experience in knowledge, and truth the whole purpose of our being.

*Epictetus: "The first business of philosophy is, to part from self-conceit."*

A man who over-estimates himself will under-estimate his world. To be humble is to admit the greatness of the universe. Out of a becoming humility arises the capacity for understanding.

*Muller, Max: "Philosophy is the knowledge of the limits of our knowledge."*

Beyond the small circle of the known stretches an eternity of uncertainties. Of this the wise man is aware but he has found security in the realization that beyond the eternities of the unknown again is the all-sufficient circumference of truth.

*Aristotle: "Philosophy is the science which considers truth."*

Though Pilate's question remains unanswered it is the opinion of the wise that it is not unanswerable. The philosopher knows that there is but one way to discover truth and that is to become truth. Philosophy is the science of becoming.

*Bulwer-Lytton: "Real philosophy seeks rather to solve than to deny."*

When the temple of wisdom is completed much of its foundation will be made up of

stones which sophists have rejected. There is no virtue in denying things as they are but there is great virtue in discovering the reason for things as they are.

*Seneca: "It is the bounty of nature that we live, but of philosophy that we live well; which is, in truth, a greater benefit than life itself."*

To live without thinking is to descend to the state of the brute, but to crown life with intelligent action is to rise to the estate of the supermen.

*Lavater: "True philosophy is that which makes us to ourselves and to all about us, better."*

There is no merit in wisdom, there is no reward in knowledge, there is no comfort in faith, unless these things manifest outwardly subduing the violence of action and bringing us to a harmless mode of existence.

*Nisbet: "The modern skeptical philosophy consists in believing everything but the truth, and exactly in proportion to the want of evidence; in making windows that shut out the light and passages that lead to nothing."*

Philosophy is nothing if not noble; it is of no value unless it inclines the race to gentle virtue and noble action. To the measure that it fails to adore the One, serve the Beautiful and venerate the Good it fails to be philosophy.

*Voltaire: "The discovery of what is true, and the practice of that which is good, are the two most important objects of philosophy."*

Thinking is not merely an exercising of the mind, it is a directing of the mind. Only such as have organized thought to the accomplishment of some actual good are worthy to be denominated wise.

*Shaftesbury: "The sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society, and beautiful in nature, and the order of the world."*

Philosophy is founded upon vision and experience; vision to perceive a noble end and experience to modulate mans' natural impulse to over hasten the reformation of his world.

*Plutarch: "Philosophy is the art of living."*

The arts are sciences of the beautiful, and if philosophy be the art of living it must be the art of living beautifully.

*Shaftesbury: "It is not a head merely, but a heart and resolution, which complete the real philosopher."*

Reason arises not from intellect alone but from the whole life. It is built upon wise thinking, generous feeling, and trained perceptions.

*Thoreau: "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts; but to so love wisdom as to live according to its dictates."*

Philosophy is first living then thinking. The philosophic life is the only foundation upon which an intelligent life can be built.

*Seneca: "Philosophy is the art and law of life."*

By this Seneca infers that philosophy is a rule of procedure, a code by the living of which man becomes worthy of happiness.

*Selden, John: "Philosophy is nothing but discretion."*

By discretion we should understand that regulation of action by which all intemperances are controlled whether they be of the mind or of the body. He who is discreet is above an unreasonable act and may be just termed wise.

Cowley: "To be a husbandman, is but a retreat from the city; to be a philosopher, from the world; or rather a retreat from the world as it is man's, into the world as it is God's."

The world of God and the world of man are not separated by any distance other than the interval of understanding. As we grow wise we depart not into some distant country but rather we perceive the wise man's world emerging from the very ignorant world of our own sphere.

Burke: "Philosophy is queen of the arts and the daughter of heaven."

The wisest of the sages have always maintained that wisdom had its beginning not among men but among the gods from whom it descended for the salvation of humanity.

Seneca: "Philosophy is the health of the mind."

It is normal for man that he should think well but the blight of materialism has destroyed his birthright to wisdom. It is therefore necessary in this benighted age for each man to struggle valiantly if he is to achieve to a normal and reasonable state.

Londos: "A true philosopher is beyond the reach of fortune."

To be truly wise it is necessary to so love wisdom that there is no place left in the mind for anxieties concerning the temporal state. He who lives in desire for plenty or in fear of loss has no right to call himself a philosopher.

Sims: "Philosophy is reason with the eyes of the soul."

The intellect in itself can perceive nothing beyond that which is intellectual but the intellect when quickened with spiritual perception bestows the philosophic viewpoint.

Hare: "The business of philosophy is to circumnavigate human nature."

A philosopher must be fortified against himself. Philosophy is a conspiracy against the inadequacy of ourselves. By it we are given courage to act more nobly than is natural to the human animal.

Lamartine: "Philosophy is the rational expression of genius."

We may define genius as special aptitude but when special aptitude is directed to the most important of all efforts, the perfection of

self, it is termed philosophy. A philosopher is a genius who has discovered the most perfect use of his abilities.

*Joubert: "Whence? whither? why? how?—These questions cover all philosophy."*

Whence—God. Whither—to God. Why—law. How—wisdom.

From the Infinite to the Infinite we must proceed. The why of life is known only to the Maker. But from philosophy we learn how to fit ourselves into the plan of life and to prepare ourselves for final identity with our Cause.

*Carlyle: "The philosopher is he to whom the highest has descended and the lowest has mounted up; who is the equal and kindly brother to all."*

Between heaven and earth stands the wise man. His earthy part has been raised to its highest perfection as the instrument of a divine purpose. The higher part, the soul itself, has become tolerant of the limitations of the body and wise in its own weakness is tolerant of the limitations of all other things.